

**SENATE HEARING TESTIMONY**

**June 19, 2001**

**Committee on Indian Affairs  
White Earth Reservation, Minnesota**

**by**

**Doyle Turner, Chairman**

**Chairman Daniel Inouye and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs I am honored to provide testimony today on behalf of the Tribal Membership of the White Earth Reservation concerning important issues in reference to justice, law enforcement and maintaining a high quality of life for our people.**

**We are experiencing limited economic growth do in large part to our gaming enterprises. The growth has provided increased employment opportunities and allowed us to add resources that are used to improve services to our clients . However, the economic boom and period of prosperity that this country is experiencing collectively does not translate to the people of White Earth at the same pace as the dominant society.**

**It does, however, present Indian Country with many increased social problems and the need to address them. Our communities are unable to participate in this improved quality of life if their living environment is not safe. My testimony today will focus on the need to provide a quality public safety program that not only includes a police unit, but will merge our culture in a community policing effort.**

**The White Earth Reservation currently has a public safety program that has a police department funded primarily by Community Oriented Policing Service grants from the Department of Justice. Our Police force, established in 1995, is able to maintain a relatively small force that because of limited resources is unable to effectively serve our area of jurisdiction.**

**Minnesota is a public law 280 state which allows the State and counties to assume concurrent jurisdiction with the Tribes. In addition recent court cases state that Indian Tribes in Minnesota must assume civil authorities in civil matters. These court actions add new demands on our law enforcement and judicial efforts which further dilutes our limited public safety resources.**

**All Indian Country is currently impacted by the return of membership to the**

reservation from urban areas because of our economic growth, availability of employment, and the restriction imposed by the welfare reform time frame for assistance. This population shift from areas outside the reservation brings with it housing shortages, increased substance abuse issues, gang related activity and increased domestic problems all of which creates increased social unrest and a greater involvement from the reservation law enforcement and judicial services.

We appeal to this committee to assist us in the following area:

- The current time frame that fund Department of Justice Grants (COPS) be extended to allow the continuation of our reservation public safety (police department). The reservations do not have a tax base to draw funds to assume the financial responsibility for the COPS program.
- Increased funding for our court system to allow for the development and implementation of criminal and civil codes. Funding would provide for the professional prosecution and defense for the membership .
- Funding for community policing, auxiliary police, youth police cadet program and prevention in the substance abuse programs..
- Funding for the construction of a correctional facility. Currently a violator that is arrested and prosecuted through of courts can not be confined to a holding facility because one is not available, or the cost to house prisoners in a county facility is to costly.

In summary the White Earth Reservation must provide a safe environment for our people. If this can be accomplished it will improve our quality of life by expanding our economic base and reducing social problems. I am leaving a narrative and a listing of our unmet needs required for our Tribal Government to provide quality services to our membership.

Thank you for this opportunity and I request favorable consideration be given to my request on behalf of the White Earth people.